

**BUDAPEST, Hungary** - U.S. Rep. David Price (D-NC) today led a House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC) delegation in representing the United States during official programs commemorating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. In remarks at the commemoration, Rep. Price presented greetings from President Obama celebrating the anniversary and Hungary's role in changing European and world history.

The Hungarian commemoration marks the first stop of a week-long HDAC delegation to Mongolia, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste over the House of Representatives' July 4th recess. Joining Rep. Price, who chairs the Commission, are Reps. Vern Buchanan (R-FL), Jim Cooper (D-TN), Bob Etheridge (D-NC), Phil Gingrey (R-GA), and Jim McDermott (D-WA).

HDAC is charged with promoting responsive, effective government and strengthening democratic institutions in emerging democracies. Central to the Commission's work is peer-to-peer cooperation to build technical expertise that enhances accountability, transparency, legislative independence, and government oversight in partner foreign legislatures. More information about HDAC is available on the Commission's website at <http://hdac.house.gov>.

Rep. Price's full remarks are copied below.

## **Remarks by U.S. Representative David Price (D-North Carolina)**

### **Head of the United States Delegation**

### **Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the Fall of the Iron Curtain**

**Budapest, June 27, 2009**

Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, Ministers, Ambassadors, Fellow Parliamentarians, Distinguished Guests:

I am pleased to represent the United States of America at this ceremony to mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. Our new President, Barack Obama, is unable to attend today's ceremony; however, he has asked me to read the following statement to the people of Hungary:

*It is with great pleasure that I join you in commemorating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain.*

*June 27, 1989, was a turning point in history. Few dates have shown the world so vividly the power of the human spirit over adversity and the power of hope and freedom over tyranny and despair. The peaceful destruction of the barbed-wire fence separating Austria and Hungary --- and the brave decision of the Hungarian and Austrian governments to open their borders --- set the stage for the spread of freedom to surrounding nations, the end of communist control in the region, and forever changed the political landscape of Europe. In just a fraction of an ordinary lifetime, Hungary swept aside the Iron Curtain and remade itself as part of a Europe peaceful, united, and free. Today, an entire generation of children has come of age in a free Hungary that is a steadfast friend of the United States, a valued NATO ally and a citizen of Europe.*

*We salute all those who found the courage to stand up for this change and set in motion the progress that very much continues to this day. On behalf of the people of the United States, I offer my congratulations on this most important celebration, and my warmest wishes for continued friendship between our two great nations.*

*Sincerely, Barack Obama*

I am honored to join you today as an official representative, but for my wife Lisa and me this visit also has personal significance. We first visited Hungary on our wedding trip 41 years ago. We ventured to Budapest and Prague for several memorable days – made all the more so when Soviet tanks brought an end to the Prague Spring only one week later. We have felt a special kinship with central and eastern Europe ever since, and along with millions of Americans we marveled and rejoiced twenty years ago as the Hungarian and Austrian foreign ministers

severed that barbed wire fence and the Iron Curtain fell.

In the meantime, I had been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Many of our Members sought to engage with the parliamentarians, most of them newly elected, of Hungary and the other transformed democracies of central Europe. We created a task force in 1990 to work cooperatively with these parliaments. We hope that we made a significant contribution – for example, helping establish parliamentary research services in the Hungarian parliament and elsewhere in the region. But I assure you that we received far more than we gave, in inspiration and in the reminder you provided of the calling we share: to make what Lincoln called government "of the people, by the people, and for the people" a reality.

Today our Congress is represented here by six members of the bipartisan House Democracy Assistance Commission, the successor to that earlier task force. Through our partnerships, we work to strengthen the role of parliaments in fourteen democracies around the world, including Macedonia, Kosovo, Georgia, and Ukraine in this region. From Hungary, we depart tomorrow to meet with our counterparts in Mongolia, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste, emerging democracies that hope to emulate your success.

We often say that, while elections are a critical democratic institution, what happens between elections is equally important, as we attempt to build responsive and effective representative institutions. The true triumph of the people of central Europe is not merely how you cast off the tyranny of communism through the course of 1989, nor merely the free and transforming elections that you held, but also how you have built free democratic societies in the ensuing two decades.

Our country is proud to stand with you in these ongoing efforts, understanding that we have much to learn from one another and much to gain from mutual collaboration and support. The challenges we face are as difficult as they have ever been in this twenty-year period. The global economic downturn confronts all of our countries, and we must continue to coordinate multilateral responses that go beyond what any of us can achieve alone. Our alliance is at a critical point in the confrontation with violent extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Our agenda for the future, indeed, is long and daunting. But it is appropriate, even essential, that we pause to look back at a time such as this. We are instructed and we draw strength from what the free nations of central and eastern Europe have accomplished and what we have been through together.

We salute you, and we pledge continuing cooperation and friendship as we face the many challenges of a new day.

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